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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: PALESTINIAN-JORDANIANS SHARE THEIR VIEWS ON HAMAS

REF: A. AMMAN 809

[1](#)B. AMMAN 718

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) While the GOJ is in full agreement with the U.S. on the need for Hamas to renounce terror, recognize Israel and respect past international agreements, Palestinian-Jordanian opinion makers believe that Hamas should be given a "fair chance" to run a Palestinian government without expressly meeting such conditions. Both business leaders and political analysts think that Hamas will prove more pragmatic and less ideological than the rhetoric of its leadership. They also argue that formal ties between the GOJ and Hamas are "inevitable" and in the best interests of Jordan. A halt of Western aid to a Hamas-led government, they warn, could provide Hamas with a scapegoat for its shortcomings and rally public opinion in its favor. They caution that many Palestinians believe the man in the street will not notice a cut-off of foreign aid since in the past (under Fatah) it never reached him. In contrast to these opinions, East Bank nationalists almost uniformly view Hamas as a "foreign organization" that can only harm Jordan's interests. End Summary.

GIVE THEM A CHANCE

[1](#)2. (C) Post in recent days has contacted several prominent Palestinian-Jordanians to gauge their impressions of a possible Hamas-led Palestinian government, as well as their opinions on Jordan's relations with Hamas. Among the mostly secular businessmen and political analysts we talked with, all agreed that Hamas should be given a "fair chance" to establish a government and administer the Palestinian Authority (PA) after its democratic election victory. Sabih al-Masri, one of the richest men in Jordan with business interests in the West Bank worth over USD 2 billion, told poloff that while he "hates" the extremist rhetoric of Hamas and was "upset" over its electoral win, he nevertheless felt it was important that Hamas be given a real opportunity to govern the West Bank and Gaza. "If Palestinians want to give them a chance to rule, then they should be given a legitimate chance," said Masri. Political analyst Oreib Rintawi, Director of the Al-Quds Center for Political Research, similarly argued that Israel and the West should respect the political choice of the Palestinian people and not try to "sabotage" a Hamas-led government. Despite his strong opposition to extremist ideology, Rintawi said that Hamas would likely prove less corrupt and more efficient in running the PA, and would also be more successful in rounding up illegal weapons.

MORE PRAGMATIC THAN YOU THINK

13. (C) While most of the elite Palestinian-Jordanians we contacted expressed concern over the extremist rhetoric of some Hamas leaders, they were nearly unanimous in believing that Hamas would follow a mostly "pragmatic" course if in power, at least initially. "You can't expect Hamas to change overnight, but it has already shown signs of flexibility," stated Rintawi. "They know they have to deliver on several fronts and will act accordingly." Prominent journalist and former Member of Parliament Hamada Faraaneh cited several instances which, in his opinion, showed Hamas was capable of putting pragmatism over ideology, including its past decision to abide by a "truce" with Israel. Masri likewise said he believes Hamas will pursue a realistic agenda, rather than one driven by ideology. "Don't listen to (Mahmoud) Zahar. A lot of that is just for show," he said. Masri noted that representatives of his companies active in the West Bank had recently met with Hamas members and found them to be "very reasonable," as well as supportive of promoting private business investment. None of our contacts thought it likely, however, that Hamas would reconsider its refusal to directly recognize Israel or to accept publicly the Oslo accords or the Roadmap.

"YOU CAN'T NOT TALK TO THEM"

14. (C) When asked about the future of GOJ-Hamas relations, our Palestinian-Jordanian contacts said such ties were "inevitable," particularly if Hamas formed a new Palestinian government. "How could Jordan ignore Hamas if it is running things in Palestine?" queried Masri, stating that a lack of official dialogue would be "bad for business." Rintawi and Faraaneh claimed that the Palestinian-Jordanian majority in the country would be "very upset" with the GOJ if it did not establish relations and publicly support a Hamas government across the Jordan River.

A WORD OF CAUTION

15. (C) A final common theme raised by most of our Palestinian-Jordanian elite contacts was the need for continued international aid to the West Bank and Gaza under a Hamas-led government. Masri said a halt in economic assistance would be a "major mistake," and would give Hamas a convenient excuse for failing to improve Palestinian living conditions. "Don't let them use the U.S. or the West as a scapegoat to rally public opinion," he urged. A cut-off of donations, Rintawi believed, could well turn the Palestinian civil service and some other sectors of society against the new government. However, at the same time it could further push into Hamas' arms the many more Palestinians who had no stake in the Fatah regime. "They were already suffering under Fatah -- why would they give (Fatah) a second chance? They're just as likely to turn to violence and confrontation with Israel if things get worse." Faraaneh similarly stated that a majority of Palestinians - many of whom believed that foreign assistance had never benefited them due to Fatah corruption - would not blame Hamas if outside powers were seen as encouraging donors to scale back assistance.

COMMENT

16. (C) The views expressed above stand in sharp contrast to the deep mistrust of many East Bank nationalists toward Hamas, who regard it as a "foreign organization" pursuing an agenda that could damage Jordan's interests. The GOJ, for its part, is in full agreement with the U.S. that Hamas must renounce terror, recognize Israel, and respect past

international agreements entered into by the PA.

HALE